

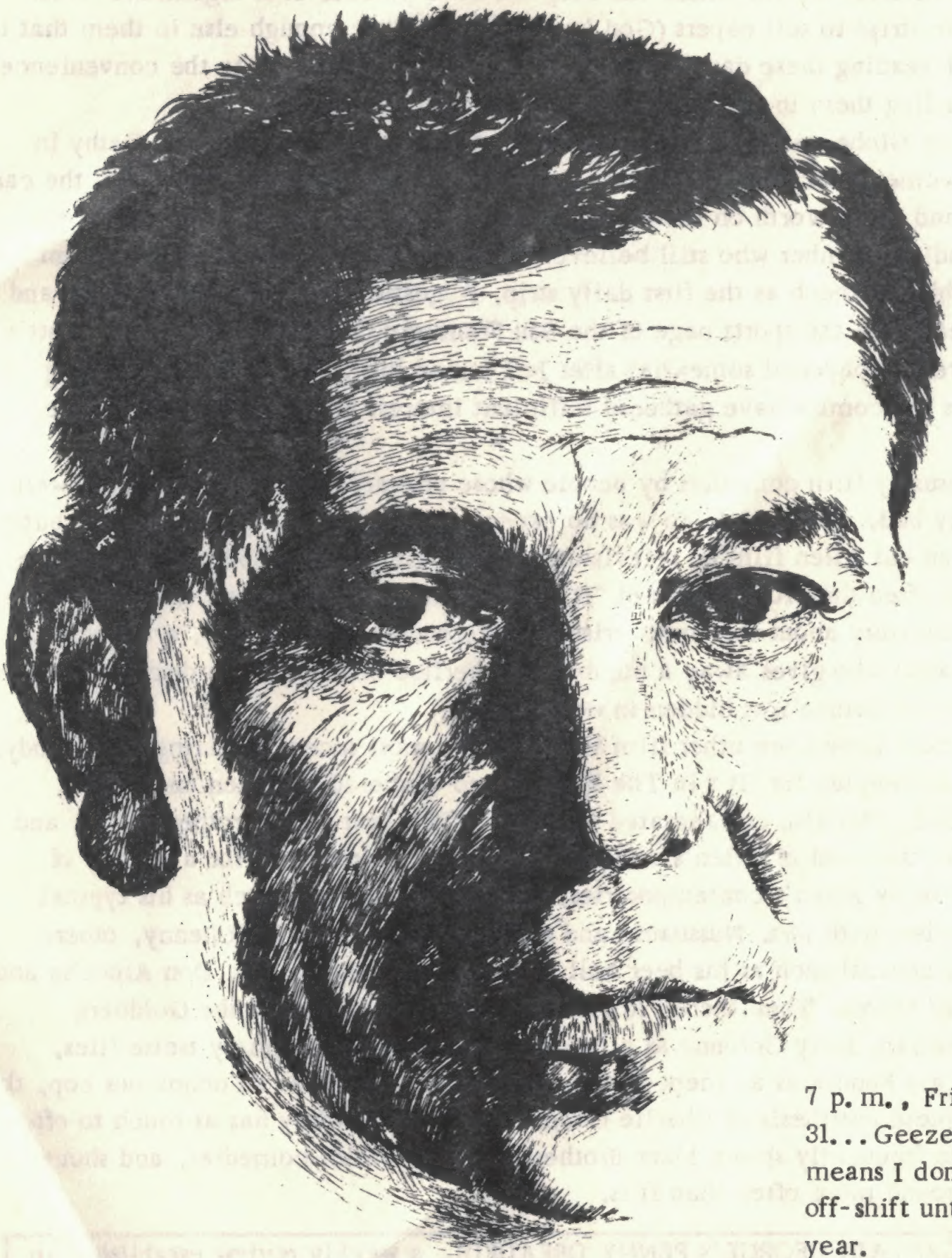
CAPTAIN GEORGE'S

Penny Dreadful



TORONTO, DEC. 31, 1976

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7 p. m., Friday, Dec.
31... Geeze, that
means I don't get
off-shift until next
year.

A WEEKLY REVIEW

GUEST COLUMN

BY GARY MOFFATT

Although I avoid sports like the plague, I have often found Tank McNamara highly amusing. Recently, a number of newspapers removed Tank from their comics page and put him in the sports section instead. This move seems to me highly questionable; it means that in order to read the strip I have to look over page after page of newsprint which otherwise I wouldn't even bother to open in order to find where the strip has been placed. It is legitimate to use comic strips to sell papers (God knows there's little enough else in them that is worth reading these days), but surely the reader is entitled to the convenience of finding them in one place once he's bought the paper.

The Globe and Mail is putting the Outcasts on a news page and Cathy in the women's section; at this rate they'll soon have Gasoline Alley with the car ads and Mary Worth on the weddings page, since she seems to be one of the dwindling number who still believes in them. There is historical precedent for all this inasmuch as the first daily strip, Augustus Mutt, concerned sports and appeared on the sports page of the San Francisco Chronicle. However, Mutt's interests broadened somewhat after Jeff joined him, and in the intervening years the comics have gathered sufficient interest to merit their own place.

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Usually film comedies by people whose primary success was on radio were pretty bad, and Fred Allen was no exception to this rule. However, I recently saw an old Allen film on television which I felt worthy of being shown much more often than it is. Entitled "It's In The Bag," it was based on the familiar Russian story about the impoverished entrepreneur (in this case, a flea circus operator) who gives away a number of inherited chairs only to discover that a valuable fortune was hidden in one of them.

There have been other film versions, the most recent featuring Ron Moody. The screenplay for "It's In The Bag" was co-authored by Allen and Morrie Ryskind, who also collaborated on many of the best Marx Brothers films, and makes the most of Allen's droll wit. The plot makes room for a variety of cameos by Allen's contemporaries, some radio-oriented such as his typical interview with Mrs. Nussbaum and slanging match with Jack Benny, others more unusual such as his beer hall quartet with Rudy Vallee, Don Ameche and Victor Moore. Then there's Robert Benchley explaining a Rube Goldberg mousetrap, Jerry Colonna as a psychiatrist swatting imaginary tsetse flies, William Bendix as an inept gangster and Sidney Toler as an obnoxious cop, the complete antithesis of Charlie Chan. The film certainly has as much to offer as the frequently shown Marx Brothers or W. C. Fields comedies, and should be around more often than it is.

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DON MILLER

It wasn't Christmas without Lionel Barrymore playing Scrooge on the radio. Or for the television generation, there was a yearly presentation of Dragnet's Christmas story. It was the first one shown in color, and the first time they ran it a 16mm print was used instead of the expected 35mm, something about more reliable hues. Time marches on, and perhaps somewhere they ran an old Barrymore transcription. Maybe even the Jack Webb Yuletide show was on. If not, RCA issued a ten-inch LP recording that collectors may trot out to play for their own seasonal amusement.

There just had to be at least one TV station on the continent running *Miracle On 34th Street* during the past week or two. The Santa Claus in that movie is long gone, and the little girl grew up to become Maggie in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* earlier in the month, *tempus fugit*. Otherwise, stations were scrambling to schedule films with the Christmas spirit; various reference books have compiled lists of them.

Several holiday seasons, a New York City TV station would play *The Thin Man* for Christmas and *After The Thin Man* for New Year's, thus giving all of us a double holiday treat. Appropriate too, for Nick Charles solves the mystery of the missing Thin Man during Christmas, and in its sequel the first murder is committed at the stroke of twelve as the old year is ushered out, along with the victim. It became an atmospheric treat to watch these films and to look forward to them. They both are excellent, and to view them in the proper setting adds to the enjoyment.

It's highly doubtful if any station played Robert Montgomery's version of Raymond Chandler's *Lady in the Lake* because of the time of year, but it works wonderfully well. Montgomery as a tyro director was condemned or praised for using the subjective camera for the length of the film. But he accomplished other neat bits of business too. Since the story took place around Christmas-time, instead of the usual MGM lush score Montgomery used an a capella chorus for the opening credit music, singing carols. The main one was "God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen."

Back in the good old days, all the theatres would run specially made short trailers featuring a top actor or actress extending season's greetings. They were unfailingly warm, sincere, sometimes presented with a sly sense of humor. One of the nicest--it may have been 1937, or perhaps 1938--was done by Fredric March. After giving a brief word or two about the spirit of the season, March very seriously ended with "...and so, on behalf of the management of this theatre and all the employees, let me extend to each and every one of you--including that man sleeping, right over there (pointing)--a merry Christmas and a happy New Year."

Nearly 40 years later, may I wish you the same?

PETE HARRIS

SILENTS PLEASE: The Revue theatre in Toronto will be presenting a Thursday night series of silent films from the collection of American film historian Paul Killiam beginning Jan. 13. These will be color-tinted prints, which is the way moviegoers saw a lot of films back in silent days. The opening program consists of a Douglas Fairbanks double bill--The Mark of Zorro (1920) at 7:30, and The Black Pirate (1926) at 9:15. The Jan. 20 program will be devoted to Rudolph Valentino--The Eagle (1925) at 7:45, Blood and Sand (1922) at 9:15. On Jan. 27, Buster Keaton shows up in College (1927) at 7:45 and The General (1927) at 9. Three more Thursday night programs are scheduled.

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WW AND RR: Now here's a superhero crossover that not even my fevered young imagination could have conjured up back in the 1940s--Roy Rogers is to guest star in an upcoming episode of ABC-TV's Wonder Woman. The show will be called The Bushwackers and Roy will portray a rancher-widower whose problems in rearing five war orphans with his own son are complicated by rustlers.

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CONSTANT VIEWER: It would be difficult to find another night of movie viewing to match the Sunday, Dec. 26, TV schedule in the Toronto area. The CBC French network had the silent version of The Thief of Bagdad (1924) with Douglas Fairbanks and by coincidence Peterborough's ch. 12, which many Torontonians pick up via cable, had the 1940 Korda version with Sabu, June Duprez, John Justin and, in one of the screen's great exercises in villainy, Conrad Veidt as Jaffar. CBC's ch. 5 continued its Capra series with the original Lost Horizon with Ronald Colman, Sam Jaffe, Thomas Mitchell, Edward Everett Horton, Jane Wyatt, H.B. Warner et al, and Buffalo's ch. 2 had John Ford's The Grapes Of Wrath with Henry Fonda, Jane Darwell, Russell Simpson, John Carradine, Charley Grapewin, etc. I must confess to a certain amount of dial twiddling but mainly I stuck with Korda's Thief of Bagdad which I hadn't seen in years and which lived up to all my fond memories.

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COMIC CUTS: All you fanatics who faithfully clip newspaper comic strips better sharpen up your scissors or lay in a new supply of Xacto blades. The Spider-Man daily strip, written by Stan Lee and drawn by John Romita, begins Jan. 3. In Toronto, it will be running in The Star. New York magazine quoted Dennis R. Allen, president of the Register and Tribune Syndicate, as saying that editors are hot for the strip "because of its proven readership. They believe it will attract young readers to the newspapers. I can't see a 55-year-old banker delving into the Amazing Spider-Man, but I can see his 22-year-old son interested, because Spider-Man has human frailties. Young people find him believable."